

REMARKS BY KATHLEEN S. KILPATRICK
JOINT SUBCOMMITTEE EXAMINING THE COST AND FEASIBILITY OF RELOCATING THE
MUSEUM AND WHITE HOUSE OF THE CONFEDERACY
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Mr. Chairman, thank you for allowing me to be here on behalf of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources, the agency charged with supporting the preservation of Virginia's landmarks. I want to address issues raised at your first meeting with an emphasis on the preservation aspects and implications, and point to the broader issues inherent in your efforts to help the MOC put itself on a sound footing. I acknowledge and sympathize with the organization's difficulties. But, the challenges are many, not all unique, and the issues complex. There is no silver bullet. I am here as an advocate for the preservation of the White House. I urge your understanding of the complexities, and every effort to find targeted, meaningful but measured solutions, not cure-all promises that are really once-and-for-all steps with no guarantees, made at the risk of an American landmark.

As you said, Mr. Chairman, ultimately to relocate the White House is a private decision. Much is at stake, however, and the public is keenly interested. The Museum and White House is open to the public, the White House is a National Historic Landmark, it has received substantial public funding and assistance, it is a vital component of Richmond's tourism assets, and one of the city's premier downtown landmarks.

Furthermore, the very existence of this special subcommittee underscores and heightens the sense of the public's stake. Your recommendations will reflect on the Commonwealth, on policies and practices, possibly setting precedents and new directions. Your recommendations will certainly send signals and create expectations for other sites, including for the many sites in the downtown area.

These sites, Mr. Chairman, are shown on the map pulled together quickly from our database. There is no question that the downtown area, the area near the Museum and White House, has changed through time--dramatically in recent decades, and in ways both welcome and most regrettable. Undoubtedly the downtown will continue to evolve. This is in the nature of urban environments. Think of Boston, New York, Philly, Baltimore, and other great American First Cities. But, history has not been lost altogether, and we shouldn't toss it out. Sites are fragmented here as elsewhere, but much survives, in place, as critical community assets: educating, attracting tourists, but also quite literally fostering community by enriching the modern landscape, giving it texture, interest and definition, and connecting us daily, in the very core of our Capitol city, to our history.

History is a continuing story. The challenge and the opportunity looking forward is to grow and change while doing right by our historic assets and our communities so both can thrive. It is certainly not to relegate our downtowns to the texture-less, the history-less, and to try to gather up our history and move it to convenient, false enclaves.

Besides the White House are: the Wickham-Valentine House, the Benjamin Watkins Leigh House, the William A. Grant House, the Beers House, The John Marshall House, and the Putney Houses, as well as Monumental Church, the Egyptian Building, and Old First Baptist Church. Nearby are buildings that Jefferson Davis frequented, the very connections to which are the reason the White House is where it is: the Capitol, the Executive Mansion, the old U.S. Customs House where Jefferson worked, St. Paul's Episcopal Church where he worshipped. A short walk to the south is the great James and Tredegar.

If the White House were moved, these relationships, these connections, would be destroyed. To the sponsors of new construction, we would be saying, "Never mind, have at it." This would both

compound difficulties for the future and squander opportunities in new projects to correct the existing problems, to do better. To the sites we would be saying, "You're on your own."

OFFICIAL RECOGNITION

Against this background, let me clarify the historic status of the White House. The White House has several designations; it is important to understand the terms, the implications, and what is at stake.

The White House of the Confederacy is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and the Virginia Landmarks Register. These two parallel lists acknowledge that a property possesses some quality of significance in local, state, or national history. About 2,500 places in Virginia have been so listed.

The White House is 1 of only 117 of these 2,500 Virginia properties to have been designated as well by the Secretary of the Interior as a National Historic Landmark. NHL status is the highest designation, only granted to the *crème de la crème*; places that by definition have *high integrity* and are of *outstanding significance* and *surpassing interest* to the *American people* as, again by definition, *essential to understanding our nation's shared history*. The White House was designated an NHL on December 19, 1960, in the first year of the NHL program's existence, and on the very same day that the John Marshall House, the Virginia State Capitol, Monticello, and Mount Vernon were so designated.

Mr. Rawls mentioned the plaque on the building. The plaque recognizes facts, as do historical designations: that *this house, this place, this site*, is of surpassing historical importance. And, let me be very clear on this: the history of the White House is tied critically and inextricably to its place, its very location. Here President and Mrs. Davis lived and lost a child; from here he walked to work and to worship. Remove the building from its location, and more than government-issue symbols are imperiled. The historical and cultural relationships, the very things that make this place significant, those connections – a subject on which Sen. Hawkins was most eloquent last month – would be torn apart. In short, the very history of this American place would be lost in the shuffle.

A LAST RESORT

Whether you view the White House as the Museum's "biggest artifact," to use Mr. Rawls' term, it is not one artifact among many in the Museum's great holdings, to be picked up and moved like an object in an exhibit case. Mr. Rawls noted that preservationists believe historic buildings should be moved only as "a last resort," but that he did not understand that phrase. "Last resort" means to avoid an imminent threat of destruction from demolition. It's a salvage strategy when preservation in place is simply not possible. This is a preservation term, not an organizational one.

Furthermore, even when this essential test – to avoid demolition – can be met, there are specific criteria meant to minimize the loss inherent in such a relocation. These include: moving all of a building, not just parts; relocation in tact is preferred to deconstruction; location to a carefully chosen site, as nearby as possible, is preferred; and to a comparable site—one with the same associations, historical context, and relationships to other sites. Relocation to form an artificial collection of otherwise historically unrelated buildings for the purpose of convenience or interpretation is strongly discouraged. These are the issues DHR and the NPS would look at in working with property owners to relocate a threatened resource so as to retain its history and thus listing. Without prior approval by DHR and NPS of a plan reflecting these nationally recognized best practices, a property is automatically removed from the state and federal registers when moved. Superintendent McLeod will have to speak to any NHL delisting process. It is outside our experience. Indeed, the only NHL I know of that was moved after being designated is the

Cape Hatteras Lighthouse. I have a hard time imaging how a property might continue to be an NHL if no longer even able to meet the test for the state and federal registers.

However compromised its setting, the White House is not under threat of demolition. Perhaps I should underscore that there is a distinction, and apparently some tension, between the interests of the MOC as an organization, on the one hand, and those of the White House as a landmark and the MOC's core stewardship mission in that regard. I hope this distinction is recognized and ways can be found to reconcile the tensions.

EDUCATION AND TOURISM

Let me say a word about education, a core mission about which Mr. Rawls spoke with justifiable pride, passion and concern. I share his concern that the Commonwealth should help, but there is a point that needs to be made. Mr. Rawls said, "The outside experience is 'foreign' enough that we simply cannot teach there..." It is true that the direct visual interconnections between the White House and other critically related sites are blocked by newer, and out-of-scale, construction. Nevertheless, those related sites still stand just a short walk away to be experienced by visitors. How much more difficult would be interpretation if the White House were moved to a different site? How would the Museum then take visitors outside and teach them about the site and the places where Davis walked, where history was made, if those buildings were miles away? From an educational standpoint, isn't it better to ask the visitor to stretch his imagination (and legs) at the real site rather than have him stand at a new location and readily imagine what never was?

Examples of comparably important historic sites cheek-by-jowl with modern development, even those of overwhelming proportions, are not hard to find: the Paul Revere House in Boston; the Babe Ruth Museum in Baltimore; the Betsy Ross House in Philadelphia; the Walt Whitman Birthplace on Long Island; St. Paul's Chapel at Trinity Church on Wall Street; the Alamo in San Antonio, to name but a few. No one is proposing to move these places today in spite of their settings. For an example of a building whose setting has been changed and compromised – one with confounding access and parking problems – we need look no further than the Capitol. Although it has the nice advantage of being surrounded by a varied but good collection of works of architecture, it was designed by Jefferson to be experienced as a distant and lone temple on a hill visible for miles around at a time when Richmond's "downtown" was then little more than a rough and ready village by the River. How many years has it been since we could see it clearly from the James, or, for that matter, from a greater distance than a street's width from Capitol Square? No one is proposing to move the Capitol. We respect it too much, and are instead making enormous efforts to put it in good shape and to open it up to visitors as the public treasure and trust it is. There are lessons in that, and some great opportunities for all the sites in the downtown area through partnership, planning, and programming.

I have to say, Mr. Rawls's description of the profile of the MOC visitor was very familiar: one who is "is older, better-educated, travels farther, stays longer, and spends more" than the average tourist. Every site knows this profile: it defines the cultural tourist. The data also show that the cultural tourists expects an authentic and multiple site experience – for example, to see the site where Davis lived and the places that he frequented, for example, not a building divorced from its context in an unrelated environment.

Ironically, the idea of removing the White House from downtown comes as Richmond is experiencing a downtown resurgence in which the White House could play a central role. The Investment in the Capitol, a new Convention Center, the American Civil War Center at Historic Tredegar that plans to open before the 2007 Jamestown commemorations, and four years after that, the sesquicentennial of the Civil War will begin with enormous opportunities to work with the NPS. Today, the Richmond National Battlefield Park Visitor Center at Tredegar attracts at least 60,000 visitors downtown annually. The VTC mails out at least 85,000 Civil War Trails brochures a year worldwide that promote such sites as the White House, and the city is a major player in the

Trails network through the Convention and Visitors Bureau. New residents are moving downtown, condominium and apartment developments are being planned or nearing completion, selling out while still on the drawing boards. Richmond, which has finally begun to promote its Civil War history, perhaps encouraged by more inclusive interpretative approaches, and is attracting more tourists and residents downtown than at any time in recent memory. This is not a time to leave.

PUBLIC INVESTMENT

It is a time to recommit to our historic assets and to our investment in them. Mr. Rawls noted that designations do not preserve sites: they do pave the way for public funding. Mr. Rawls mentioned funding; let me give some details. Between 1966 and 1990, the White House attracted about \$615,000 in state funds for site operations, and another \$280,000 during the years 1998–2000—about \$895,000 altogether. The White House also received state funds for restoration activities in the amounts of \$100,000 in 1977 and \$1,000,000 in 1988, as well as a federal matching grant of \$17,500 in 1976 for a restoration feasibility study and subsequent work. The taxpayers have furnished more than \$2 million for operations and restoration—a considerable public investment.

In recent years historic attractions that receive state restoration grants funds are required to donate a perpetual easement to the Commonwealth to protect the taxpayer's investment. There was no state requirement in connection with the state funds given to the Museum of the Confederacy in 1988. As a direct result of the federal planning funds, however, the Museum of the Confederacy was required to enter into a term covenant with DHR's predecessor, the Virginia Landmarks Commission, and DHR must administer that covenant. It commits the Museum and White House of the Confederacy to "maintain, repair, and administer the Property [the White House] so as to preserve the historical integrity of its features, materials, appearance, workmanship and environment." The words "appearance" and "environment" in the context of "historical integrity" mean that the White House must be preserved at its present site while this covenant is in effect until April 28, 2007.

STATE STEWARDSHIP

The Commonwealth hasn't always been the most accommodating of neighbors, nor has it been the best caretaker of the historic resources it owns. Good preservation is not about a frozen landscape, but a hallmark of stewardship is careful consideration of what we have and a commitment to balanced public interest decisions and to reasonable efforts to avoid adverse effects to important resources. DHR's role in ensuring consideration is advisory, including as to other state agencies. Far too frequently our input is not requested until so late in an agency's process as to make changes virtually unthinkable to a project sponsor who is ready to go: too costly, time-consuming, just impossible. And so a review is not unlikely to seem both adversarial by its nature and at once a paper exercise. Against that background, and because I truly believe that the state can and must do better, as neighbors, property managers, and as a leader by example, I welcome the subcommittee's acknowledgment that state actions have real community consequences. We hope this interest will translate into support for a stronger and more meaningful process. I know the wider preservation community is looking for that.

We take our mission seriously, and we are not shy. Mr. Rawls acknowledged our help with "a small mitigation for the current construction period." I have to say we stretched our advisory role pretty far. Like the MOC, the VCU/MCV Health Systems is not a state agency. Nonetheless, when VCU (which is a state agency, or was then, in any event) asked for comments on the demolition of a building adjacent to the MOC, we pressed for information. When we learned that the demolition of the state-owned building was to clear the site for a huge new Health Systems facility, we argued that that facility, regardless of state agency status, was not possible but for the state demolition. Accordingly, we pushed hard, and very much alone, on behalf of the White House and for significant modifications, enhancements, for design review, etc. We didn't get what

we wanted, but under the circumstances I have to thank MCV and the Health Systems for even talking to us, much less agreeing to a mitigation package.

The package is one of several agreements that VCU/MCV has made over the years in an effort to try to accommodate historic resources into phenomenal levels of growth, not to mention its direct stewardship of many historic buildings spotted among VCU/MCV's holdings. But, more should be done. Downtown Washington offers an example. There, new growth and construction, modern, large-scale architectural buildings, co-exist relatively peacefully and relatively compatibly with historic buildings. How? The philosophical approach starts with a strong presumption against demolition of important historic buildings. When preservation of a building is not possible, historic facades are often incorporated into new construction in order to preserve a street-scale and a sense of historic design. D.C. has strict height limitations, a strong review process, and a commitment to good design, not the biggest box we can get for the buck. The government itself uses a design excellence approach. I hope the subcommittee will endorse such strategies for the future, and that VCU will employ them.

But to return to the agreement we did get and the fixed "givens" of that agreement: a tight site, no flexibility on location, and none on the aggressive program space requirements on that tight site. The agreement provides, not for approval, but for a design comment process, which is ongoing, and I cannot say we have complaints given the starting point of the agreement. The stated commitment of the parties is to try to achieve, through exterior design, articulation, materials and color, for example, to preserve some compatible street scale. Also, per the agreement parking will be provided in the garage. Traffic on Clay will be somewhat more limited than it is today, and new lights, benches, and landscaping will be provided. These things will in real ways improve conditions as they have been for years. All this is mitigation, however – including compensation up to \$100,000 a year for reduced visitation – mitigation for a new and out-of-scale building.

There are issues in the agreement the subcommittee might wish to reinforce, such as the importance of good articulation, light colors, for example, or to strengthen, such as compensation, or even reopen. I believe, for example, that easy access and parking are critical issues. It is within the power of VCU/MCV to provide not just parking, but dedicated parking in the garage, preferably on the open level so museum patrons know where they are headed and can get to it. Clay Street traffic should be as limited as possible, but I believe it should be an entrance to the garage for MOC visitors if possible. What is also needed is a human-friendly and quick way out of the garage for patrons, onto 12th for example, so that people are not sucked down, spun about, and then shot out, disoriented, onto 13th.

ALL IN IT TOGETHER

The challenges today for museums and historic sites are real and substantial all across the country: tight competition for charitable funds, public and private, and for the visitors' dollar, visitors who both want more and increasingly may be willing to settle for virtual travel in the face of a net explosion, rocketing fuel costs, 9/11 worries, SOLs combined with shrinking school trip budgets. The White House is in this same boat.

Similarly, many of the environmental issues are not unique to the MOC or Richmond, but characteristic, to one degree or another and at one time or another, to downtown settings: inharmonious development, poor directional signage, lack of parking and ground transportation, noise and activity. These issues pose challenges that can be addressed with targeted solutions, with good will and good planning, and with and through partnerships and cooperative initiatives. The poor condition of Richmond's streets throughout the city and the city's utter fascination with one-way streets is certainly exceptional and this can and should be untangled.

I encourage you to remember and hear from those who can be the MOC's partners, who are indeed eager to work together to enhance the visitor experience and the vitality and effectiveness of downtown sites through cooperative efforts from parking to programming, and from

administration to advertising. There are opportunities for the Museum of the Confederacy to partner with Tredegar, with the Valentine, with the John Marshall House, with the Park Service, with the City of Richmond, and with VCU to find common and common sense solutions to common problems as neighbors and partners. I hope you will urge and support these efforts in any way. Much critical thinking and planning – for signage and way-finding, shared parking and ground transportation, for example, and for sorting out of the maze of one-way streets – could be supported by Transportation Enhancements grants with the right push.

CONCLUSIONS

Mr. Chairman, I believe that the White House is already in the right place – its historic place. There is no magic elsewhere. The trick is to sort out the problems and deal with reality in the downtown museum district.

Let me leave you with this. Mr. Rawls mentioned those ladies who saved the White House from destruction by the City. Their first mission was preservation, and their first goal was to preserve the White House in place. He mentioned as well that many of these very same women founded the APVA, the oldest statewide preservation organization in the nation. These women, together with those who formed the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, the oldest national preservation, founded preservation in America. America still looks to us in Virginia. We owe those women a great deal. I hope we will live up to their lesson and their legacy.

Thank you. I would be happy to answer any questions.